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PARIS FOR MORAN; LONDON FOR YOUNG

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TAGS: PREL PGOV EAID NG
SUBJECT: QADHAFI VISIT: HE CAME, HE SAW, HE LEFT

REF: (A) NIAMEY 2168; (B) USDAO TUNIS 091214 MAY 97

CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR CHARLES O. CECIL. REASON:
1.5(D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. WHAT HE LEFT BEHIND WILL BECOME MORE APPARENT IN THE COMING DAYS. QADHAFI STAYED ABOUT 24 HOURS. THE MAIN PUBLIC EVENT WAS HIS ADDRESS TO THE FAITHFUL AT THE NIAMEY MOSQUE THURSDAY AFTERNOON, IN WHICH HE CALLED FOR THE ABANDONMENT OF THE FRENCH LANGUAGE IN FAVOR OF ARABIC, AND THE REPLACEMENT OF THE WESTERN, "COLONIALIST" SOLAR CALENDAR BY THE LUNAR CALENDAR. NIGERIENS LINED THE STREETS TO WELCOME HIM, BUT IN NUMBERS NOWHERE NEAR THE MILLION CLAIMED BY TRIPOLI RADIO. THREE LIBYAN AIRCRAFT--TWO 727S AWD A 737--WERE ON THE TARMAC AT ONE TIME, AND OTHER AIRCRAFT PRECEDED THE VISIT WITH ADVANCE TEAMS. NIGERIEN OFFICIALS CLAIM THAT THE LIBYANS TOLD THEM THE AIRCRAFT CAME FROM JERBA, IN TUNISIA. OTHER REPORTING INDICATES OTHERWISE. SOME OF QADHAFI'S REMARKS MUST HAVE BEEN EMBARRASSING TO BARE AND HIS GOVERNMENT. MEDIA COVERAGE WAS DEVOTED EXCLUSIVELY TO QADHAFI'S STATEMENTS; NO NIGERIEN OFFICIAL STATEMENTS WERE BROADCAST OR PRINTED.
END SUMMARY.

THE VISIT SCENARIO

¶2. (U) THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF SUFIS TAKING PLACE IN NIAMEY MAY 7-13 SERVED AS THE FOCAL POINT FOR YESTERDAY'S VISIT TO NIAMEY BY LIBYA'S COLONEL QADHAFI, HIS FIRST VISIT TO NIGER SINCE 1974. QADHAFI ARRIVED AROUND 9:00 TO A GALA AIRPORT RECEPTION COMPLETE WITH VARIOUS DANCING TROOPS. THOUGH INVITED, AMERICAN AND EUROPEAN AMBASSADORS OR CHARGES (FRENCH, GERMAN, BELGIAN AND EUROPEAN COMMUNITY) DID NOT ATTEND THE ARRIVAL. AFTER A LONG RECEIVING LINE, INCLUDING FORMER PRESIDENTS ALI SAIBOU AND MAHAMANE OUSMANE (THE FIRST TIME WE ARE AWARE OF HIS BEING IN AN OFFICIAL RECEIVING LINE SINCE HIS OVERTHROW JANUARY 27, 1996), QADHAFI AND BARE RODE THROUGH THE CITY STANDING IN AN OPEN WHITE STRETCH CADILLAC, WAVING TO THE CROWDS. SCHOOL CHILDREN WERE DISMISSED TO LINE THE ROUTE. MANY ADULTS DID TOO, BUT TRIPOLI'S CLAIM THAT A MILLION NIGERIENS GREETED THE COLONEL IS A GROSS EXAGERATION. THE MOTORCADE MADE ITS WAY DIRECTLY TO THE LIBYAN EMBASSY, WHERE NIGERIEN MINISTERS AND OTHER NOTABLES WELCOMED THE LIBYAN LEADER AGAIN.

¶3. (U) THE 4:00 AFTERNOON PRAYER OUTSIDE THE MAIN NIAMEY MOSQUE, BUILT WITH LIBYAN MONEY, WAS LED BY QADHAFI, WHO ALSO DELIVERED THE SERMON AFTERWARDS. THOUSANDS ATTENDED, WITH A SPECIAL ENCLOSED AREA FOR VIPS. THE SPEECH, REBROADCAST IN ITS ENTIRETY ON THE EVENING TV NEWS, WAS REMARKABLE FOR ITS MEANDERING REPETITIVENESS AND FOR ITS CONTENT.

¶4. (U) AS BARE AND HIS MINISTERS SAT ON CARPETS IN FRONT OF QADHAFI, QADHAFI BEGAN WITH A FIFTEEN MINUTE RAMBLING DISSERTATION ON THE SOLAR AND LUNAR CALENDARS.

HE CALLED UPON MUSLIMS TO ESCHEW THE SOLAR CALENDAR, WHICH HAD BEEN IMPOSED ON THEM BY COLONIAL RULERS, AND WHOSE MONTHS WERE NAMED AFTER PAGAN GODS OR ROMAN AND GREEK EMPERORS. THESE PAGAN NAMES HARKENED BACK TO SUN WORSHIP AND POLYTHEIST GODS. THE ADOPTION OF THE SOLAR CALENDAR IS PROSCRIBED BY ISLAM, HE SAID.

¶ 15. (U) THE LUNAR CALENDAR, WITH ITS FOUR HOLY MONTHS, IS THE CALENDAR PREFERRED BY GOD. THESE HOLY MONTHS ARE MORE POWERFUL THAN THE RESOLUTIONS OF THE UNITED NATIONS, SAID QADHAFI. IF MANKIND HAD RESPECTED THESE HOLY MONTHS, PEACE WOULD HAVE PREVAILED EVERYWHERE WHERE WAR NOW RAGES, MORE EFFECTIVELY THAN THE DECISIONS OF THE U.N. AND THE SECURITY COUNCIL, WHICH, LIKE THE SOLAR CALENDAR, HAVE BEEN IMPOSED BY COLONIALISM.

¶ 16. (U) HE THEN TURNED TO THE FRENCH LANGUAGE. FRENCH COLONIALISM HAD IMPOSED ITS LANGUAGE, ITS CULTURE, AND ITS RELIGION ON AFRICA. MUSLIMS MUST REJECT ALL OF THIS. "HOW CAN WE IMAGINE A MUSLIM WHO DOESN'T KNOW HIS LANGUAGE, THE LANGUAGE OF HIS RELIGION, OF HIS KORAN, OF HIS GOD?" ASKED QADHAFI RHETORICALLY. "GOD DOESN'T KNOW FRENCH. MUMAMMAD DIDN'T KNOW FRENCH. THE COMPANIONS OF THE PROPHET DIDN'T KNOW FRENCH. THE MECCANS AND MEDINANS AND THE KORAN ITSELF DON'T KNOW FRENCH. AFTER REPEATING THESE THEMES IN VARIOUS WAYS, TRANSLATED CLEARLY AND PRECISELY BY THE INTERPRETER INTO FRENCH FOR THE AUDIENCE, QADHAFI THEN CALLED FOR A NEW EFFORT, STARTING YESTERDAY, THE FIRST DAY OF THE NEW MUSLIM YEAR 1418, FOR A SPECIAL EFFORT, A SACRED BATTLE, TO RID THE WORLD OF ALL COLONIAL HERITAGE.

¶ 17. (U) THERE WERE EVENING FUNCTIONS TO WHICH NON-MUSLIMS WERE NOT INVITED. QADHAFI DEPARTED FRIDAY MORNING FOR KANO.

ATMOSPHERICS AND ADMINISTRATIVE DETAILS

¶ 18. (C) AIRCRAFT: THREE LIBYAN AIRCRAFT WERE ON THE TARMAC AT ONE TIME. THE SECURITY TEAM'S AIRCRAFT WAS A BOEING 737 WITH TAIL NUMBER SA-DNJ. ONE OF TWO 727S WAS QADHAFI'S, PROBABLY WITH TAIL NUMBER SA-DIC. OTHER TAIL NUMBER WAS NOT AVAILABLE. FOLLOWING THE DCM'S TWO DEMARCHESES OF WEDNESDAY, THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE MFA CALLED THIS MORNING TO REAFFIRM THAT LIBYAN OFFICIALS HAD TOLD THE NIGERIENS THAT THE AIRCRAFT HAD DEPARTED FROM JERBA, IN TUNISIA. WHEN THE DCM NOTED THAT THE AIRCRAFT WERE IN ANY CASE LIBYAN, AND ASKED IF THE GON WOULD BE HOLDING ANY OF THEM, THE SEC-GEN REPLIED THAT HE HAD NO INFORMATION ON THAT POINT. WE HAVE OTHER REPORTS THAT CHARTERED TUNISIAN AIRCRAFT, AND POSSIBLY A BULGARIAN AIRCRAFT, ARRIVED BEFORE QADHAFI WITH ADVANCE PARTY. WE DO NOT KNOW HOW THE CADILLAC GOT HERE. SECURITY WAS VERY HEAVY. LYBIAN UNIFORMED TROOPS, INCLUDING QADHAFI'S FEMALE, MACHINE-GUN TOTING GUARDS, WERE PRESENT AT THE AIRPORT, IN THE MOTORCADE AND IN AND OUTSIDE OF THE LYBIAN EMBASSY.

¶ 19. (C) BARE: TV COVERAGE SHOWED A SOMBER AND RESTRAINED PRESIDENT BARE, SEEMINGLY TENSE. SMILES COULD ONLY BE SEEN WHEN WAVING FROM THE CADILLAC. NONE OF BARE'S STATEMENTS WERE COVERED BY THE GOVERNMENT TV OR NEWSPAPER. MEDIA ATTENTION WAS EXCLUSIVELY FOCUSED ON QADHAFI.

¶ 10. (U) AN EDITORIAL IN TODAY'S GOVERNMENT PAPER, LE SAHEL, EXPLAINED THE VISIT AS FOLLOWS:

--"IN OUR POLICY OF GOOD-NEIGHBORLINESS, IT IS INDISPENSABLE TO MAINTAIN PERMANENT CONTACT AND DIALOGUE. IT WAS IN THESE TERMS THAT PRESIDENT BARE DEFINED HIS RECENT VISIT TO LIBYA."

--"NIGER...DESIROUS OF MAINTAINING PEACE AND SECURITY BOTH INTERNALLY AS WELL AS IN THE SUB-REGION INTENDS TO

NOURISH RELATIONS OF FRIENDSHIP AND UNDERSTANDING WITH ALL COUNTRIES WITH WHICH IT SHARES A COMMON BORDER."

--"THERE ARE NUMEROUS NIGERIENS WHO LIVE AND WORK IN LIBYA."

--"NIGER AND LIBYA...ARE TWO SISTER-COUNTRIES CONDEMNED TO COOPERATE AND LIVE TOGETHER IN PEACE AND RECIPROCAL UNDERSTANDING."

COMMENT

¶11. (C) IT IS IN NIGER'S INTERESTS THAT IT NOT INCUR LIBYAN HOSTILITY, AS IT CLEARLY DID WHEN IT RE-ESTABLISHED RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL LATE LAST YEAR. NIGER IS SEEKING ANY LEVERAGE AVAILABLE TO SECURE THE RELEASE OF THE CANADIAN AND NIGERIEN HOSTAGES HELD BY TOUBOU TRIBESMEN IN THE NORTH. MANY NGOS HAVE WRITTEN THE GON IN RECENT WEEKS, STRESSING THE NECESSITY OF BRINGING THE HOSTAGE SITUATION TO AN END IF THESE NGOS ARE TO BE EXPECTED TO CARRY OUT PROJECTS IN THE NORTHERN AND EASTERN REGIONS OF THE COUNTRY. THE GON NEEDS THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THESE NGOS AND IS SEARCHING FOR ANY HELP, INCLUDING LIBYAN, TO BRING IT TO AN END.

¶12. (C) TO THE EXTENT THAT THE USG CARES ABOUT HUNT OIL'S ABILITY TO DRILL ITS WELLS IN THE NORTH OF NIGER WITHOUT ITS EMPLOYEES BEING TAKEN HOSTAGE, OR WITHOUT LIBYA ASSERTING CLAIMS TO NIGER'S UNDEMARCATED FRONTIER, IT IS IN THE USG'S INTEREST THAT NIGER-LIBYAN RELATIONS BE FREE OF RANCOR.

¶13. (C) MANY OF THE NIGERIENS ON THE STREET, BESIDES THE SCHOOL CHILDREN WHO WERE TAKEN THERE BY THEIR TEACHERS, WERE THERE OUT OF A MIXTURE OF MOTIVATIONS. THE GOVERNMENT ASKED THEM TO LINE THE STREETS; THOSE WHO SUPPORT THIS GOVERNMENT DID SO, BUT SO DID OTHERS. (LE SANEL MADE A POINT OF THANKING FRDD LEADERS FOR ENCOURAGING THEIR MEMBERS TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE DEMONSTRATION OF PUBLIC WELCOME.) MANY NIGERIENS, ESPECIALLY THOSE WITH LITTLE EDUCATION, ASSOCIATE LIBYA WITH A POSITIVE IMAGE OF MONEY, WORK, AND CONSUMER GOODS; THEY WANT THE BORDER OPEN, SO THEY CAN WORK AND BRING GOODS HOME. THEY ARE LESS CONSCIOUS OF THE OPINION OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY CONCERNING COLONEL QADHAFI.

¶14. (C) WESTERNERS WHO DON'T NORMALLY LISTEN TO COLONEL QADHAFI, OR READ HIS SPEECHES, MAY OVERREACT TO HIS REPETITIOUS, SIMPLISTIC, ANTI-WESTERN EXHORTATIONS. NEVERTHELESS, MOST EDUCATED NIGERIENS VALUE THEIR FRENCH EDUCATION AND THEIR AFFINITY FOR FRENCH CULTURE, EVEN THOUGH THEY MAY CRITICIZE FRENCH GOVERNMENT POLICY AND HEAVY-HANDEDNESS IN SEEKING ECONOMIC DOMINATION OVER FRANCOPHONE COUNTRIES. THEY ARE NOT ABOUT TO LEARN ARABIC NOR ADOPT THE LUNAR CALENDAR. HEARING THE LEADER OF A RICH NATION ADVOCATE SUCH MEASURES IN ALL SERIOUSNES MAY BOTH AMUSE THEM AND PUT THEM ON GUARD. THIS IS NOT A MAN ONE WANTS TO GET ON THE WRONG SIDE OF. THE LESS EDUCATED, HOWEVER, MAY FIND HIS SIMPLISTIC AND REPETITIVE ARGUMENTS EASY TO UNDERSTAND AND REPEAT, AND LOOK TO RELIGION FOR SURCEASE OF SORROW IN TIMES OF ECONOMIC DEPRIVATION. BECAUSE THERE ARE A LOT MORE OF THE LATTER IN NIGER THAN OF THE FORMER (THE EDUCATED) ANY NIGERIEN GOVERNMENT MUST TREAT QADHAFI WITH CARE.

CECIL